

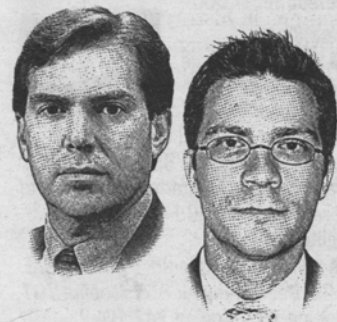
**INSIDE VIEW**

# Fading Transformation?

## Reject Any Effort To Close OFT

**T**here is growing speculation that the U.S. Secretary of Defense's Office of Force Transformation (OFT) will soon be disbanded. By any measure, such a step would be a major mistake.

Symbolically, it could be interpreted as a victory for those who argue we should abandon



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expensive efforts to transform military forces with information-age technologies, and concentrate on winning the even more expensive war on terrorism, a Hobson's choice that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has rightly rejected.

More importantly, however, it

would be a substantive mistake as this office, established in 2001 to stimulate transformation, has contributed value far in excess of its costs and is still needed.

Speculation about the demise of OFT picked up momentum with reports that the prestigious Defense Science Board might recommend its elimination. The argument in favor of this action, evidently, is that OFT is no longer useful because the military now widely accepts the need for information-age reforms, and because external organizations can promote innovation in place of OFT. This assessment is overly optimistic and misinformed.

It is overly optimistic because the transformation agenda is at best only partially implemented. Five years ago the administration shook up the Pentagon with powerful new ideas in its 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review, claiming that it wanted to make transformation a priority, and innovation part of Pentagon culture.

Yet working out the details of transformation's implementation still requires hard, sustained effort. Important reforms such as network-centric warfare, standing joint force headquarters and capabilities-based planning are

being implemented, but very slowly.

Those who favor closure are also wrong about the value of an organization like OFT. Units promoting innovation typically require insider status and high-level protection; otherwise, their activities are brushed aside by those responsible for current and near-term operations.

To date, OFT has used its independent stature to good effect. It is not possible to enumerate all of OFT's contributions here, but a few examples illustrate its value.

OFT's promotion of network-centric warfare (see OFT's landmark 2002 publication, "New Rules for a New Era") had a major impact on Pentagon planning, making the case for substituting information for mass, and fighting first for information superiority. This thinking led to the cancellation and revision of major programs, some of which previously had no requirements for interoperability with the larger information network.

OFT also pioneered interest in smaller, more affordable satellites; new concepts for strategic mobility; and new concepts of operation for timely logistics

support. As you read this, OFT and the Army are cooperating to field a new set of systems called "Sheriff" to better protect U.S. troops in Iraq.

Even if innovation were ingrained in the Pentagon's culture and processes — which it most assuredly is not — OFT serves the Pentagon well as a knowledge center. Industry uses knowledge centers to promote innovation by culling and disseminating world-class advancements in concepts and technology from academia, industry, allies and competitors.

OFT collaborates with Pentagon laboratories and diverse internal and external partners to develop innovation opportunities. OFT also exchanges insights with allies and friends of the United States who are busy with their own transformation efforts.

OFT is not right on all issues, nor should it be expected to be so. However, it contributes to force development the way Andy Marshall's Office of Net Assessment has contributed to creative strategic thinking for decades. Both offices are small and engage in the type of team-oriented, cross-functional analysis that is a rarity in the rigid Pentagon

bureaucratic structure.

With so many innovation resources now centralized in Joint Forces Command (JFCOM), it is particularly important to safeguard small pockets of alternative ideas. In fact, JFCOM needs both OFT's oversight and advocacy.

JFCOM's role as Joint Force trainer and provider tends to clash with its responsibilities for joint experimentation. OFT keeps JFCOM honest by establishing experimentation criteria and assessing annual transformation progress, but also promotes the results of JFCOM experiments when they point the way forward.

Disbanding OFT is the wrong symbolic and substantive move. It would signal a fading commitment to transformation. Keeping OFT and assigning it a high-profile leader to replace the departed Arthur Cebrowski, a luminary in transformation circles, would indicate that the secretary remains committed to transformation, and still understands the value of an institutional gadfly for force innovation.

It would be odd indeed if a Pentagon leadership committed to transformation, and which has yet to make a dent in the size of Pentagon headquarters, employing more than 15,000 personnel, decided that the less than 30 people who make up OFT were too large a price to pay for creative thinking about the future. What a pity that would be. ■